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ABSTRACT

The culture of the United States has been based on assimilation, in which new immigrants tend to put aside their past, including their linguistic past, and merge with the rest of society. As the United States economy becomes more intertwined with that of the rest of the world, these patterns are changing, and there is now a greater recognition of cultural heterogeneity. This recognition is in large measure bypassing Europe, the influence of whose languages in other parts of the world has also changed profoundly. How can the teacher of languages respond to this change? First, the teacher should show how language functions as a social institution. Second, the teacher must go beyond the high culture of the metropolis and give consideration to the linguistic diaspora--to the use of European languages also in the Third World. In this curricular reform, the teacher can work with colleagues in other fields individually or in groups, make changes in classroom materials, and learn from the experience of colleagues in other institutions. (Author)

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THE GLOBAL IMPERATIVE AND THE TEACHING OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

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THE PICTURE, familiar to the student of the Renaissance and after, of the schoolboy swatting up his Latin, and of the schoolmaster alternately catechizing and birching his pupils, never had very wide currency in this country. While some of this style of education persisted in the colonies, the spirit of the newly created United States was very much the spirit of practicality and pragmatism. "It would be well if they could be taught every Thing that is useful," wrote Benjamin Franklin in his Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania (1749). While these Proposals stressed continuity with the educational systems of Europe, they put great emphasis on the acquisition of practical knowledge. Languages are mentioned here and there in the text, but always as a means to an end.

This practical strain in American education has persisted throughout the history of the United States. It was a fundamental element in the development of the state university system in the mid-nineteenth century, in the evolution of the research university at the end of the century, in the development of undergraduate preprofessional education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the community college system, and of course in the American emphasis on local control of elementary and secondary education.

While difference of language has always been part of the social reality of the United States, the national culture has tended, inevitably, to emphasize assimilation and integration. So many of the immigrants who have come to these shores have been anxious to forget the past, anxious to move as rapidly as possible into the mainstream of American life. Their old languages, like their old customs, have been things to discard, as the unneeded trappings of

old indignities and oppressions. Or at the very least they have been relegated to the home, and the mark of participation in the public life of the country, the mark of civic identification, has been English.

So the history of language learning in this country has always been a somewhat rocky one, at least in comparison with the countries of Europe. Languages have stood for one side of the split personality of the American -- the side that looked to Europe as its cultural mentor, as opposed to the side that struck out on its own, the side that produced a Walt Whitman, or the home-grown religion of a Joseph Smith. The American has looked at foreign languages with something of the bewilderment/by Henry James's at things European expressed heroines or the Americans of Hawthorne's Italian novel The Marble Faun.

This cultural ambivalence has left its mark not only on the curriculum of our schools and colleges but also on the simple ability of Americans to learn foreign languages. Like the Japanese, whose culture also displays a marked ambivalence toward foreign influences (though of a very different kind), Americans are poor language learners. They are culturally conditioned to be so, and this is a special problem that the teacher of languages in this country must face.

While James and Hawthorne grappled with the problem of this country's allegiance to Europe, and while a Henry Adams explored with fascination the history of European civilization, the allegiance to Europe, so strong even a mere thirty years ago, has weakened drastically. To a much greater degree than before, Americans are aware of the cultural heterogeneity of their country -- an awareness stimulated by the civil rights movement of the 1950s, the bilingual education movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and similar develop-

ments. These changes were hardly the result of some spontaneous growth in awareness. They spring from significant changes in the world scene, above all from developments outside Europe, particularly the movement towards political independence in the Third World, which might be characterized as the greatest political change on the world scene in the last thirty years. Though political decolonization is now almost complete (pace Argentina), the economic shift from North to South continues. In the past few years there has been a significant tilt in U.S. trading patterns away from Europe. Reverse investment, whereby foreign capital is invested in the U.S., continues to grow, much of it from non-European countries (for example the Middle East). Among the major trading partners of the U.S. today are such non-European countries as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. The picture has changed fundamentally in the postwar period.

These shifts, and the changes in social patterns in the U.S., have had their effect on our notions not only of our ties to Europe but of the very idea of high culture itself. Benjamin Franklin notwithstanding, traditionally we have tended to look on languages as a key to that high culture, a key to unlock the literary classics of the great European languages. We can no longer take received ideas in this area for granted. While many of us hope to preserve the great tradition, however we perceive it, we must recognize that it will not return in the form in which we once knew it, and that our own values, if we are to preserve or discover what is best in all cultures, must change to fit a changing world.

Inevitably, the shifts in emphasis in world communication and trading patterns, to say nothing of changes in political balance, have had their effect on the configuration of the world languages. Numerous countries of the Third World are working on what can only be described as linguistic decolonization, and the use of English as a language of domestic politics is in many countries on the decline. So, too, is the use of French. Spanish has all but disappeared from

the continent of Africa, Dutch is no more than a remnant in the Far East. One-third of the original member-states of the United Nations (1945) were European. English and French were working languages. The majority of the population in four-fifths of the original member-states spoke a European language. Today only one-sixth of the member-states are European. Arabic and Chinese are among the working languages of the General Assembly.

Of all the colonial languages, only English has retained its major influence in the world more or less without diminution. For every domestic administration lost, it has gained new converts as the language of the new technology. While this influence in the world may last only as long as the United States maintains its economic authority (and this authority is slipping), and while even English is by no means as widespread as so many of our ethnocentric colleagues suppose, the linguistic battle of the Third World is above all the battle between English and the non-European languages. The central role of the other European languages on the world scene is weakened, and that weakening is irreversible.

At the same time, the sheer quantity of international contacts has risen enormously since the Seond World War.

+ Between 1960 and 1977 direct foreign investment in the United States rose 77%, and our investment abroad rose 123%.
+ Imports of goods and services between 1960 and 1977 went up 246%, and exports rose 202%.
+ The first regular jet service across the Atlantic was established in 1958. The first artificial satellite was launched a year earlier, in 1957. In 1965 five countries had satellite antennas. The figure in 1979 was 114.
+ In 1950 Americans made 900,000 telephone calls overseas. In 1975 they made over 60m.

+ The first computers date from the mid-1940s. Today large sectors of modern society depend completely on computer systems. What filled an entire room in 1945 would fit in a suitcase today.
+ Americans, who make up 5% of the world's population, use 27% of its raw materials. Out of 30,000 gallons of petroleum used in the world per second, the U.S. uses 10,000.
+ World problems continue -- or are created by our technology. World poverty: 1.3 billion people, of 4.5 billion, are undernourished. 250m children will probably never learn to read and write. The oceans are increasingly polluted. Acid rain is a major problem in Europe and North America Violations of human rights continue. The problem of refugees has reached unprecedented proportions.
+ Yet international institutions have grown stronger and, even in an age of senseless nuclear confrontation, offer some hope for solutions.

To an increasing degree, Americans are realizing that these are issues that must be confronted in the classroom. Interdependence is not a political policy; it is a political, economic, and social reality -- one that we must deal with if we are to survive. Hence the spate of pronouncements on the need for global education in our classrooms at every level. This was the conclusion of a Task Force on Global Education established by the Office of Education under the Carter administration. It was the conclusion of the Education and the World View Project sponsored recently by the Council on Learning. In some instances, these and other learned organizations talk of the need to include certain important matters in the curriculum. In other instances, individual educators talk of the need to change students' ways of looking at the world. In one of the most eloquent statements on the subject, Robert Hanvey talks of

creating in students a"global awareness." It is at least arguable that this spirit must enter the classrooms of our colleges and universities if our students are ever to be prepared for a world twenty or thirty years hence. Many thinkers argue that internationalizing education means much more than simply adding international elements to the curriculum. The curriculum itself should be conceived in universal terms, and elements of a regional and domestic nature should be included to serve particular needs. In short, higher education should be international with an overlay of national concerns, not national with, at most, an overlay of international concerns.

Despite political changes in Washington, the interest in internationalizing the curriculum continues unabated. In institutions all over the country the issue is under debate in one form or another. Conferences within and among institutions on the subject of global and international education are common. The very fact that this interest persists and grows despite domestic political changes does suggest that it is here to stay. How can language teachers relate to this development?

Perhaps we should begin by asking ourselves what we seek to achieve by the inclusion of languages in the curriculum. I would suggest that we have, or ought to have, three aims above all.

+ To teach students about the phenomenon (and institution) of language -- what it is and what its social role is. (This area is sadly neglected.)
+ To teach students how to read and speak a language.
+ To teach students how to use this language to educate themselves about the world.

Most of the emphasis in our curriculum falls on the second of these three goals, namely learning the language pure and simple. We try to give students a sense

of how languages work and what their function is, insofar as we ourselves understand these things, in the course of teaching the language. And we certainly encourage students to use the language they have acquired, but, overall, our colleagues make little attempt to tap into that skill, to make it a living reality not only in the language classroom but in the world of learning itself.

In the debate over the teaching of language, much is made of the training of the mind, and the basic linguistic training, involved in the learning of a specific language. We would all of us add to this the importance of understanding a second culture, entering into the spirit of a second language. But there are some questions here.

+ To what extent should our culture have a capital C? To what extent should we confine our teaching to the teaching of literature and so-called High Culture? Most of us would agree that we should go beyond this. But should we simply look at, say, popular literature, or should we begin to raise the kinds of questions anthropologists raise about cultures -- in other words look at culture with a small c as well?

+ Despite the shift in global focus, the European languages continue to play a major role in world affairs, even after decolonization. To what extent should we take this worldwide distribution into account? Should we perhaps teach French cultures, Spanish cultures, rather than seeing these phenomena as single entities, with a little regional variation?

In this regard, there is a good deal of emphasis, in the pronouncements on curriculum, in the value of a kind of bicultural experience through language. But to what extent should the language teacher seek to go beyond this, not only in the direction of the former colonies, the diaspora, but also towards

simply using the language as a device for gathering new knowledge about the world, from a somewhat different perspective.

It will be apparent from the very fact that I pose these questions that I have a certain set of views on the replies to the questions. I believe strongly that the college education of the future will indeed put greater stress on global affairs, on institution-building for the management of global problems. I believe that there will be relatively less stress on Europe, on the literatures of Europe traditionally conceived. At the same time, I believe that the European languages can play, indeed must play, an important role in the inculcation of global values in our students, and that that is their best hope to enter the mainstream of the college education of future years. We must do all we can to break through the monoglot approaches of so many of our colleagues. We must use the skills at our disposal not to make ethnocentrists merely Europocentric, as if replacing one region by another is all that is needed, but to see language as a window on the wider world, that can bring us into contact with Mali as well as Marseille, the Spanish Sahara as well as Salamanca, Ankara as well as Berlin. Indeed, are French and Spanish simply European languages any longer, or is the epithet merely a description of their origins? Perhaps they should be described as world languages, in the fullest sense of that term.

What can we, as faculty members concerned with languages, do to bring about these shifts in perspective? Let me mention a few specific ideas.

1. We can work individually with our colleagues in other fields. Although humanists tend to be conversant with other languages and use them in their research (less, of course, in some fields than in others), social scientists use other languages fairly seldom. There is many a college teacher of

sociology, or economics, or government, who has no command of a foreign language at all. Others, who could use foreign languages in the classroom, or who could encourage their students to read texts in other languages, tend not to do so, either because the idea would not normally occur to them or because they fear that it would be more trouble than it's worth. Perhaps an alliance between social science teachers and language teachers could provide opportunities for students of language to read texts in language classes that they could then apply to their basic social science courses. Language teachers might also be able to provide assistance to social scientists anxious to have their students read forieng texts by providing glossaries or by arranging special sessions with the students in social science courses.

2. We can arrange faculty seminars to bring social scientists and language teachers together. A faculty seminar on world problems (e.g. hunger, population, literacy) can provide particularly valuable opportunities for the language teacher, who has access to the foreign-language press, or to publications in other languages, that may be particularly valuable to, or may change the perspective of, an examination of world problems or current affairs. Such seminars, perhaps arranged around weekly brown-bag lunches, are one of the best devices I know for creating a sense of the importance of global issues in the curriculum. The language teachers in an institution can take the lead in this regard.

3. We can make use of materials other than straightforward textbook materials in our classes. It is hard to find language textbooks, at least for the European languages, that give attention to the so-called peripheries of the language community in question. But there are numerous publications, particularly newspapers and magazines, that can compensate for this disadvantage.

A publication like Jeune Afrique, for example, can be immensely valuable in making clear to the French class that French is not only the language of the Paris Metro or of Rimbaud, but also the language of government in Cameroon or Zaire or Mauritania. Documents of the United Nations are easy to obtain from the U.N.'s Department of Public Information. They can provide foreign-language material not only on the countries in which the language in question is used but also on global issues, or on parts of the world outside the influence of the target language. A major European language, after all, is a vehicle for all types of discourse, not only that associated with its own indigenous culture. A further source of assistance is the foreign student, who may be able to bring to the foreign-language classroom a perspective very different from that of the American teacher.

4. We can adapt programs used at other institutions, and gather ideas from handbooks and other publications on global and international studies. Numerous such publications exist, some of them deriving from the Education and the World View project of the council on Learning, some from the Institute for World Order, some from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. In fact there is wealth of information available on what has worked in other institutions or on what can be done to enhance the success of our own programs.

Why should we concern ourselves with such issues? Why is it important to take into consideration global issues in the foreign language classroom? There are many answers to these questions. First, we owe it to our colleagues to demonstrate to them something that they may have forgotten: that foreign languages are important, that the world views of others are significant, that a purely American approach to the problems of the world is a deficient and limited approach. Second, because language is too important to be relegated

to a backwater, a victim of austerities and budget cuts. Third, because the world is changing around us, and our survival and our contribution depend on our ability to adapt. We are in an enviable position in this regard: our own self-interest happens to be also a part of the general moral interest. The world needs foreign languages, and it is up to us to find the best ways of articulating and satisfying this need. To confine ourselves to our traditional pursuits may nonetheless be to miss this opportunity and also to fail to live up to our obligations.

American education over the years has shown itself infinitely adaptable and rooted in the practical. It is no failure on our part to recognize the need to adapt, and to wed to the best of the traditional the best of the practical, as Benjamin Franklin taught us to do even before the United States was founded.